



PURSUE GENEROSITY

FALL SERIES SERMON STUDY GUIDE

'Pursue Generosity'—Concerning How You Live

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THE MAIN THING: What is really going to matter in the end? Ultimately it is partnering with God by faithfully investing our time, abilities and money in a way that honors the God who created us, and through our expression of these gifts to the world to show the depth of God's love for them and the great grace He wishes to extend to them.

PURSUE RELATIONSHIP: *Opportunities to connect and pray as a group*

1. Given the top five fears of people (public speaking, heights, insects, losing your money and death), what is your 'top' fear? When was the last time you experienced this fear?
2. Is there an area in life that you would like to hear a direct 'word' from God? Tell us about it.

PURSUE GOD: *Time that is devoted to the Word of God* *Observation and reflection*

1. How do Proverbs 14:31 and Luke 10:27 speak to lifestyle decisions? Why are there no magic formulas for such decisions?
2. What are the dangers of materialism and asceticism? (Matthew 7:9-11; 6:26; Luke 12:20-21; 1 Timothy 6:10). What are some other Scripture references?
3. Read Matthew 25:14-28. What was the relationship between the 'man' and 'his servants'? Why do you think he 'entrusted his property to them'? Why did he give different amounts? What was he risking? What does the story show about the servants? Which servant would you be?
4. How does Mark 8:34 apply to a life of generosity?

Application

1. Do a 'talents' and gifts inventory for yourself. How are you using them to reflect God's glory?
2. Pray about new steps you need to take to invest generously in God's Kingdom.
3. What has impacted you most in this series on 'Pursue Generosity'?

PURSUE MISSION: *Seek to be the community of God's people in your community*

Further resources: 'Generosity' devotional booklet, pp. 34, 35, 38, and 39.

THE WORD (NIV).

Proverbs 14:31

Whoever oppresses the poor shows contempt for their Maker, but whoever is kind to the needy honors God.

Luke 10:27

²⁷ He answered, "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind'; and, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'

Matthew 7:9-11; 16:26

⁹ "Which of you, if your son asks for bread, will give him a stone? ¹⁰ Or if he asks for a fish, will you give him a snake? ¹¹ If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!... ²⁶ What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul?

Luke 12:20-21

... "But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?' ²¹ "This is how it will be with whoever stores up things for themselves but is not rich toward God."

1 Timothy 6:10

¹⁰ For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.

Matthew 25:14-28

¹⁴ Again, it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his wealth to them. ¹⁵ To one he gave five bags of gold, to another two bags, and to another one bag,^[a] each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey. ¹⁶ The man who had received five bags of gold went at once and put his money to work and gained five bags more. ¹⁷ So also, the one with two bags of gold gained two more. ¹⁸ But the man who had received one bag went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money. ¹⁹ "After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. ²⁰ The man who had received five bags of gold brought the other five. 'Master,' he said, 'you entrusted me with five bags of gold. See, I have gained five more.' ²¹ "His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!' ²² "The man with two bags of gold also came. 'Master,' he said, 'you entrusted me with two bags of gold; see, I have gained two more.' ²³ "His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!' ²⁴ "Then the man who had received one bag of gold came. 'Master,' he said, 'I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed. ²⁵ So I was afraid and went out and hid your gold in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.' ²⁶ "His master replied, 'You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed? ²⁷ Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest. ²⁸ "So take the bag of gold from him and give it to the one who has ten bags.

Mark 8:34

³⁴ Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.



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How do we daily live our call to a simple, generous life in a practical and God-honoring way? Would it not be simpler to have the audible voice of God telling us how to do it? For instance, should we own a house and if so, what kind? The same for a car, or clothes, or what form of holiday we should take, if any? How can we be sure our financial decisions are pleasing to God? How can we form our priorities and lifestyle in a way that does not bring tension to our family and marriage, and guilt toward God, or conflict in the church? At one time, Philip Yancey lived a lifestyle of materialism. He concluded, saying, 'It seems millions of us spend a large portion of our lives chasing what eventually proves unsatisfying.' Then, moved by verses like Prov 14:31 and the life of John Wesley, he moved in the opposite direction toward asceticism. His governing question to which he sought an answer was: 'Is there a lifestyle level above which a Christian should not live?' Yet nothing provided that answer, and he concluded by saying that he 'was only playing with living a simple lifestyle' when many in the world had far less. It became to him a bondage that was opposite to what Jesus spoke of as the life of grace - trying so hard NOT to serve money that he ended up serving it. He discovered that there was no magic formula as to how we should spend our money or to live simply.

We, like Yancey, want a law or list that says what we can and cannot own and enjoy. Jesus did not give formulas and opposed the Pharisees who tried to create them (see Luke 10:25-37 and Matt 18:21-22). What He gave us were principles that spell out God's heart on generosity while being in relationship with Him. Jesus is first and foremost concerned about the state of our heart. He is less concerned with what we do with our money than He is about what money is doing to us. A list of rules means we don't need to have a relationship with Him. He wants that intimate relationship with us where we listen to Him, and where we live in obedience to His call to be generous with what He has entrusted to us. What are these principles?

1. Do not be deceived by materialism or the love of money (1 Tim 6:10). Note that it is the love of money that is behind all kinds of evil such as greed, hoarding, envy and stinginess to name a few. In this we can define our significance based on what we have or do not have, or that it and not God will provide us with contentment, security and satisfaction in life. (See Luke 12:13-21) This man prepared for every contingency in life but for the one inevitability: death. God rendered His conclusion in verse 20 by calling the man a fool, and warns us in verse 21 that this will be so for any who put their trust in earthly riches and are not rich toward God.

2. Do not be deceived by asceticism. This is a way of thinking that sees money and possessions as evil or unspiritual and so should be avoided. It is a conviction that anything that is not essential to life should be shunned. Yet God is portrayed as a giver by nature (1 Tim 6:17, Matt 7:11). God wants us to enjoy what He has entrusted to us without guilt, and to 'live simply so that others may simply live'. It is not about one-upmanship. Those whose hearts are aligned with the heart of God will exhibit a loving and gracious spirit toward other Christians who live differently than they do. God wants us to live in grace and extend grace to others.

3. We need to be faithful to what God has entrusted to us (Matt 25:14-30). Jesus is talking about His Kingdom and gives us principles on how we are to look at what He has entrusted to us.

- a. Everything I have God owns. The gold belonged to the Master. They were only the managers of it.
- b. The money was given to advance the Master's interests. He is happy with us using what He gives us for our enjoyment. But he wants us to use these gifts of time, talents and money to advance His mission. If we are blessed, it is to increase our standard of giving, not living (2 Cor 9:11).
- c. We do not all receive the same amount of talents or treasures. We are all created equal and are equally valuable and precious in His eyes. But we are not all equally gifted or given the same amount of resources. Do not let what you believe is the unfairness of life become an excuse for irresponsibility. Be faithful with what you have received.
- d. One day we will have to give account for our lives (vs 19). Jesus commended the 5 and 2 talent fellows equally. It is not how much we have but how faithful we have been with what we have received. And he was very displeased with the one who buried his treasure, calling him wicked and lazy. The meaning here is about disobedience – in not carrying out the one thing he had been assigned to do. He failed in this once in a lifetime chance out of fear and so missed out on delighting his Master and of partnering with him in other adventures. Faithfully invest what He has given us for His glory. Am I being faithful with what God has given to me? Or am I burying it? Step out despite your fear and do what He is calling you to do (Mark 8:34). Others bury their talent by believing the lie that they have nothing to offer. You are His image-bearer and reflect a part of His glory. He has given you abilities, gifts and a host of experiences that you can share with others. Use them faithfully. What are you going to do with what God has entrusted to you?